

UKRI policy fellowships 2025: fellowship position

Fellowship title: Scottish Government housing, systems thinking and evidence fellowship

Fellowship type: Core policy fellowship

Host organisation: [Scottish Government](#)

Host team: Housing and Regeneration Social Research team, Communities Analysis Division, Tackling Child Poverty and Social Justice Directorate

Summary: opportunity to use systems thinking approaches to improve policy making, monitoring and evaluation related to housing topics within the Scottish Government

Policy topic: topics related to housing, systems thinking, data and evaluation

Research Council: ESRC

Academic discipline(s): any relevant social science background with strong expertise or experience in soft systems thinking or systems approaches

Research career stage: open to mid-career researchers

Fellowship structure

Inception phase:

Estimated start date: February 2026. Exact date to be confirmed by the host depending on onboarding and security clearance requirements

Duration: three months

FTE: 0.4 FTE

Main placement phase:

Duration: 12 months

FTE: 0.6 to 1 FTE

Knowledge exchange phase:

Duration: three months

FTE: 0.4 FTE

Work arrangements

Location requirements: the team where the fellow will be hosted is based in both Glasgow and Edinburgh, but most team meetings currently occur in Edinburgh at Victoria Quay. It may be necessary for the fellow to travel to these offices in person to carry out some elements of their work such as attending meetings, data collection, delivering training, but much of this would be determined by the methodology they propose (for example, if they propose in person interviews or focus groups). In terms of already known in-office days, the fellow should anticipate approximately four in-person days in Edinburgh at Victoria Quay or St Andrews House during the three month inception phase, one in-person day in Victoria Quay per month for the duration of the main placement phase, and a further four in-person days Victoria Quay during the knowledge exchange phase

Hybrid working: it is anticipated that most of the day-to-day work of the fellow could be carried out remotely throughout all stages of the project, with the exceptions to this outlined in the previous section. However, should the fellow be based near a relevant Scottish Government office and have a preference for in-office working, this could be accommodated. Eligible Travel and Subsistence costs are supported in the main UKRI grant. Please see full call text and guidance for more details

Security clearance: Basic Personnel Security Standard (BPSS) checks usually takes around six weeks. We would expect the successful applicant to start the security clearance application process, with support from the host team, as

soon as their fellowship has been confirmed by UKRI. BPSS must be granted before the fellow can access any Scottish Government systems. Ideally the security clearance process would be completed before the inception phase begins. This process requires having a valid Disclosure Certificate, and, if a new certificate is required a cost will be incurred. Please see [National security vetting: clearance levels](#) for more information

Fellowship description

Policy challenges:

'Housing' is an upstream determinant of health and equality, and a complex dynamic system including a wide range of stakeholders, influences and outcomes that intersects with numerous academic disciplines and policy areas. This makes the true impacts of housing policy challenging to understand and evaluate and presents a challenge for designing effective policy interventions. This project will explore internal challenges and priorities for applying systems thinking for the purposes of policy design, monitoring and evaluation. It should also support effectively identifying or addressing important tensions and trade-offs between policies; building shared understanding across policy topics; moving beyond information sharing towards meaningful collaboration; and have a particular focus on meaningful synthesis and incorporation of evidence from existing internal and external sources related to systems in ways that align with internal timescales, resources and capacity.

Approach:

The project will take a soft systems approach to produce learning about internal barriers and facilitators to implementing effective systems approaches and techniques within the Scottish Government housing context and will generate learning about internal best practice in this area that aligns with existing internal guidance and processes. There will also be the opportunity to produce learning about what works in the wider Scottish Government context by drawing insights from across other ongoing internal systems thinking projects as well. The project will likely involve internal primary data collection or participatory engagement with colleagues in different roles and teams across Scottish Government; engagement with key external stakeholders and evidence producers, and the review and synthesis of existing evidence.

The focus of the work would be narrowed, refined and agreed during the three-month coproduction inception phase based on participatory engagement with internal stakeholders and in line with what is deliverable during the fellowship period.

Anticipated research questions:

1. What are the key systems-related challenges in the housing policy context for the Scottish Government?
2. What are the barriers and facilitators to applying systems thinking approaches for policy development, monitoring and evaluation, within housing-related policy areas in Scottish Government?
3. Which systems thinking techniques work well within the Scottish Government housing context (as well as the wider Scottish Government context)?
4. What kind of learning can be generated for Scottish Government analysts about effectively integrating research evidence into systems approaches for policy development, monitoring and evaluation in housing policy (as well as the wider Scottish Government context)?

Indicative activities:

- Inception phase: familiarisation with existing Scottish Government policies, tools, training and guidance related to systems thinking; development of a Project Advisory Group; and taking a participatory approach to refining the scope, focus methodology and intended outputs
- Main placement phase: using expertise in systems thinking to take the lead on connecting internal teams as well as relevant external stakeholders related to housing policy; navigating across silos to identify key systems thinking challenges within the housing policy context, as well as barriers to and facilitators of effective application of systems thinking techniques, where necessary synthesising research evidence across relevant topics; and generating recommendations for improving practice
- Knowledge exchange phase: finalise remaining outputs and develop legacy of wider learning for Scottish Government

Potential Outputs:

- Inception phase: short inception report or presentation outlining agreed scope, methodology or approach, planned outputs, and timeline for remaining fellowship period (based on initial participatory engagement with internal stakeholders and in agreement with line manager and Advisory Group)
- Main placement phase: internal report outlining learning on internal challenges, barriers and facilitators for application of systems approaches or techniques; outputs demonstrating good practice or summarising recommendations for best practice including optimising use of relevant system-related research evidence;
- Knowledge exchange phase: strengthened links between internal housing-related teams, as well as with external stakeholders and external experts related to housing; a legacy of learning related to housing based on fellowship activities, as well as for wider Scottish Government colleagues across policy areas and professions, drawing on learning across fellowship as well as other internal ongoing systems projects
- While it is anticipated that the majority of outputs for this project will remain internal to Scottish Government, we welcome other forms of outputs including academic articles (subject to agreement and clearance by Scottish Government) and knowledge exchange activities (such as roundtables, seminars) as agreed with Communities Analysis Division and respective policy teams

Potential benefits to the fellow:

- Being embedded in the Housing and Regeneration Social Research Team and have access to internal systems and processes, gaining in-depth understanding of the policy process
- Access to a wide array of internal Scottish Government policy and analytical teams across a range of policy topics related to housing
- The opportunity to engage with other internal systems-thinking work ongoing within Scottish Government with the potential to generate learning that can be applied across government
- Opportunity to build stronger links between evidence producers and Scottish Government evidence users
- The potential to influence the way that housing policy is developed and delivered going forward in Scotland by supporting more effective implementation of systems approaches (including improving how evidence can be used as part of these processes)
- Leave with a better understanding of how to ensure that their own future high quality research outputs can effectively be integrated into the policy development and monitoring and evaluation process, leading to more impactful future research

Person specification

Applications will be assessed by UKRI panel assessment against the following essential opportunity-specific requirements in addition to the generic eligibility and call criteria:

Essential criteria:

- Proven academic track record in systems thinking or systems science, including application of systems approaches to policy-relevant topics or context
- Ability to synthesise evidence from large complex bodies of evidence from a range of disciplines and draw out key insights quickly and effectively
- Proven ability to deliver engaging and effective knowledge exchange or mobilisation activity, including working with research users to implement evidence-driven recommendations
- Ability to work with a range of stakeholders with varying perspectives and support them to reach consensus or identify shared goals and priorities within short timescales as part of a coproduction process
- Experience of delivering high quality research and analysis using qualitative, mixed methods or participatory social research approaches, as appropriate

Applicants shortlisted from the panel assessment will be assessed at the host led interview selection process against the following desirable opportunity-specific requirements:

Desirable criteria:

- Existing knowledge of evidence relevant to housing systems
- Existing knowledge of the Scottish policy context
- Understanding of operational change approaches

- Experience developing engaging teaching, training or instruction materials and resources to build capability

Processing personal data

If applicants are shortlisted by the UKRI assessment panel UKRI will need to share the application and any personal information that it contains with the host for the host led interview selection process.

Your personal data will be handled in line with UK data protection legislation and managed securely. If you would like to know more, including how to exercise your Rights, please see the UKRI [privacy notice](#).

The Scottish Government's privacy notice can be found here: [Scottish Government privacy notice](#). Hosts will delete your data at the end of the selection process unless you are successful, in which case we will retain your data as an independent data controller.